The Human Rights Organs of the Ministry of Justice (1/2)

The Human Rights Bureau of the Ministry of Justice is a national administrative organ in charge of human rights protection and its local offices are the Human Rights Departments of the Legal Affairs Bureaus and the Human Rights Divisions of the District Legal Affairs Bureaus. The Human Rights Bureau of the Ministry of Justice, the Legal Affairs Bureaus, and District Legal Affairs Bureaus and their branches carry out the work of human rights protection. Moreover, human rights volunteers who are appointed by the Minister of Justice play a pivotal role in human rights counseling service, investigation and resolution of human rights infringement cases and human rights promotion.

“The Human Rights Organs” is an abstract including human rights volunteers and their organizational structure.

Human Rights Volunteers

Human rights volunteers are private citizens appointed by the Minister of Justice. This system was established based on the concept that it would be effective for people in various fields in the local community to work to respect human rights, to make efforts to avoid infringements of the rights of the residents, and to protect human rights. This system is unparalleled in any other country.

At present, there are approximately 14,000 volunteers in all of the municipalities of cities, towns, and villages (including special wards in Tokyo) across the country, and they carry out proactive activities. Human Rights Volunteers’ Organizations have subcommittees which deal with individual problems such as children’s rights, gender equality, etc.

Human rights volunteers provide human rights counseling services not only at the Bureaus but also at temporary counseling offices set up at public facilities such as municipal offices, social welfare facilities and department stores.

When a victim files a report such as having “suffered an infringement of human rights” at a human rights counseling session or using some other opportunity, human rights volunteers conduct an investigation and strive to amicably settle the case by mediating between the parties in cooperation with the staff of the Bureaus.

Moreover, the human rights volunteers carry out human rights promotion activities that are aimed at raising local residents’ awareness of human rights. For example, they hold “human rights classes” and the “Human Rights Flower Campaign” which are aimed at elementary school students and kindergarten children and are designed to teach them the importance of caring for other people. Human rights volunteers also give lectures on human rights at local companies.

Investigation and Resolution of Human Rights Infringement Cases

The Human Rights Organs of the Ministry of Justice refer to the cases of suspected human rights infringements as Human Rights Infringement Cases. There are many different types of cases: assault and maltreatment against women, children, the elderly, etc.; infringement of the security of residence and living such as harassment by neighbors; compulsion and coercion such as sexual harassment, “power harassment” and stalking behavior; bullying at school; and defamation and invasion of privacy on the Internet. To relieve victims of those human rights infringements and prevent them, the Organs give victims some assistance (e.g. introduction of competent authorities or other organizations or legal advice), conciliate between the parties or, when the Organs find the fact based on their investigation, take appropriate measures to solve the cases, such as giving “recommendation” or “instruction” to the persons who have infringed upon another’s rights. After the completion of relief procedures, when necessary, the Organs provide aftercare for victims in collaboration with related administrative organizations.
The Human Rights Organs of the Ministry of Justice (2/2)

**Human Rights Counseling Services**

Human rights counseling services are available for all kinds of human rights problems such as bullying and corporal punishment at school, maltreatment, domestic violence, discriminatory treatment based on one’s birthplaces, disabilities or diseases and invasion of privacy on the Internet. When human rights infringements are suspected through the counseling, the Human Rights Organs initiate investigation into the cases.

The counseling services are free of charge, easy to use and strictly confidential.

**Human Rights Counseling Offices**

Human rights counseling services are available at the Human Rights Organs, District Legal Affairs Bureaus and their branches (a total of 314 locations across the nation) in person, by telephone (Human Rights Hotline, Children’s Rights Hotline and Women’s Rights Hotline) or on the Internet. In addition, counseling services with interpreters (Human Rights Counseling Offices for Foreigners) are available at Legal Affairs Bureaus and District Legal Affairs Bureaus in cities which have a large population of foreign nationals, such as Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya, in order to respond properly to their needs.

**Children’s Rights SOS Letter-Cards**

The Human Rights Organs and District Legal Affairs Bureaus distribute “Children’s Rights SOS Letter-Cards” (letter paper with a pre-stamped envelope for human rights counseling) to elementary and junior high school students nationwide as part of efforts for solving children’s human rights problems (e.g. bullying and corporal punishment at school and abuse of children at home).

**Promoting the idea of respecting human rights**

Promoting the idea of respecting human rights is one of the most important functions of the Human Rights Organs.

Public education and promotion activities are intended to make people aware of the necessity and importance of respecting human rights (e.g. the rights of “women”, “Foreign Nationals”, “People with gender identity issues”) and to spread these values among the people. These promotion activities are widely carried out for the general public and such activities are diversified. Generally speaking, the Human Rights Organs set a suitable theme annually and run all programs, which include symposia, lecture meetings, movies, various events and the use of mass media such as TV, radio and Internet.

“Parent and child symposium” on Hansen’s disease

**Promotion activities aimed at children**

- **Human Rights Essay Contest**
  The National Human Rights Essay Contest for Junior High School Students has been held since 1981 for the purpose of enabling junior high school students to deepen their understanding of the importance and necessity of human rights and to acquire a richer awareness of human rights through writing essays on human rights issues.

- **Human Rights Class**
  The Human Rights Class is a promotion activity for the purpose such as children’s learning, compassion to others and preciousness of life by making opportunities to think about bullying, and so on. Being geared for elementary school children, this is held by Human Rights Volunteers across the country.

- **The Human Rights**
  Flower Campaign The Human Rights Flower Campaign has been held since 1982 as a human rights promotion activity carried out mainly for elementary school students.

  In the campaign, children are given flower seeds or bulbs and grow them by cooperating together. We hope that they realize the preciousness of life, nurture a warm-hearted spirit and learn tenderness and compassion through this experience.